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Special Feature on “Toward New Studies on Islamic Moderate Trends”

Editor's Note

KOSUGI Yasushi*

The Center for Islamic Area Studies at Kyoto University (KIAS) started a new research project of Contemporary Middle East Area Studies under the auspices of Japan's National Institutes for Humanities (NIHU) in April 2016, in cooperation with the other four research centers for this project. The main theme of KIAS is “Formation of the Islamic Moderate Mainstream and its Challenges: Contemporarization of Knowledge Resources and Multi-dimensional Trends,” under which there are three research groups, namely, Group 1 on the ulama and Sufis, Group 2 on Islamic moderate trends, and Group 3 on Islamic economic studies.

This special feature stems from the ongoing works of Group 2. It reflects both the achievements of recent years and issues to be developed in the coming years. These days there are more works, both internationally and in Japan, on the radicals and extremists than on the moderate trends. The 9.11 attacks by al-Qaeda and the subsequent “war on terror” by America and its allies brought those who resort to arms to the fore internationally, and this reduced the influences of the moderates and the peace seekers in both the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds. The United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations in 2001 ended in frustration. The ascendancy of the “militant” on both sides continues, and the moderate trends continue to face difficulties.

However, even a simple understanding of the extremism in the Islamic world cannot be achieved by viewing it in isolation. It must be properly located in the whole spectrum of contemporary Islamic trends, if we are to grasp its precise position, its historical context and its prospects. The moderates are more difficult to study than the radicals, since the latter have clearer and often insightful arguments while the former seemingly lukewarm and obscure discourses. This feature attempts to shed light on the real faces of the moderate trends.

The first article by KOSUGI Yasushi deals with the concept of Islamic revival as proposed and widely accepted in Japan, as opposed to the concept of Islamic fundamentalism held in the West in the 1980's. It describes how Japanese studies on the Islamic world and Muslim societies were developed in the last five decades, from the perspective of an active participant and a direct witness.

The second article by YOKOTA Takayuki focuses on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the most notable popular Islamic organization in the Arab countries, and its current

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plight after the military ouster of the Morsi regime. With many years of field-based research, the author discloses the dual nature of the organization and what is very firmly continuing underneath as a moderate force, while many observers are today pessimistic on the future of the Brotherhood.

The third article by KORODA Ayaka focuses on what she calls the Islamic centrist, and analyzes the life and thought of one of its most famous intellectuals, Ṭāriq al-Bishrī, with special attention to his concept of *Tayyār Asāsī*. As al-Bishrī has not been studied well, despite his important position and popular appreciation within the Egyptian society, this article provides a valuable finding.

The fourth and last article by IKEHATA Fukiko deals with Jordan as an Islamic moderate country, or a country seeking to be so. She argues that it seeks to be a leader in Islamic moderation, and that, though this may seem too ambitious, it has good reasons and grounds for its endeavors. Since Jordan is usually considered a pro-Western modern kingdom, her analysis through Jordan's religious policies provides a new perception.

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